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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the role of schooling in the formation of students' gender identities with particular attention to the social construction of masculinity. Understanding the formation of male identity is important in thinking about the roles of teachers and classrooms. Six pre-service teachers, three male and three female, were selected at random from a pool of volunteers and asked to reflect on and reevaluate the messages they received in school in relation to their gender identities. Through in-depth interviews that were audiotaped, the participants were queried as to their experiences in developing their gender identity. The study suggests that through reevaluating their own experiences, pre-service social studies teachers may be less likely to impose limiting gender definitions on their students. A review of the literature details the research on this topic. (EH)

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SCHOOLING AND THE FORMATION OF STUDENTS' GENDER IDENTITIES

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SCHOOLING AND THE FORMATION OF STUDENTS' GENDER IDENTITIES

> Schools do not merely teach academic subjects, but also, in part produce student subjectivities or particular sets of experiences that are in themselves part of an ideological process. Conceptualizing schooling as the construction and transmission of subjectivities permits us to understand more clearly the idea that the curriculum is more than just an introduction of students to particular subject disciplines and teaching methodologies; it also serves as an introduction to a particular way of life (Giroux, 1988, p. 188).

This article focuses first on key dimensions of gender identity formation for males and then describes the process I used to help preservice social studies teachers explore their own gender identity in relation to schooling and early schooling experiences. While social studies in particular has sought to challenge sexism, the major emphasis has been on changing the role of females. Ways to enhance the position of women include incorporating a women's perspective in the history curriculum, attention to staffing and classroom interaction (Carney 1980) and generally challenging sexist stereotypes and language (Butzin 1982). Little consideration, however, has been given to understanding how the school in general, and social studies in particular, contributes to the social construction of masculinity.

It is essential that new social studies teachers are aware of their own gendered being and of the role of both the formal curriculum and the informal social arrangements of the classroom in developing gender identities. This study examined the role of

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prior school experience in shaping the gender identities of a group of male pre-service social studies teachers. One of the goals of the study was to facilitate the acknowledgement of a gendered identity as well as to embed this gender identity in the context of schooling where it is profoundly shaped to begin with. Through reflecting on the role of schooling in the formation of their own gendered identites, future male social studies teacher may be less likely to promote limiting definitions of masculinity for their students.

Although there has been an increase in interest in the men's movement with the publication of Robert Bly's book, "Iron John," the study of masculinity has received only marginal interest in the academic community. While patterns of oppression for females, people of color and working class students have been documented by critical theorists (Giroux, 1988; Mclaren & Hammer, 1989) and feminist theorists (Culley & Portuges, 1985; Weiler, 1988), little consideration has been given to understanding the experiences of schooling for people with at least one social identity of privilege, white males of both working-class and middle and upper-class backgrounds.

One of the reasons why the question of privileged identities has been overlooked is that men appear to be in the most advantageous position in a patriarchal culture, it is commonly assumed they are in control of their own sex role development. It is therefore difficult to imagine that men would do anything to disadvantage themselves seriously (Taubman, 1986). One of the

privileges of being white and middle-class, is that of being able to take for granted one's own subjectivity (Martin and Mohanty, 1986). Critical theorists have been challenged for the lack of regard to questions of their own privileged subjectivities as white males (Ellsworth, 1989). As a white middle-class male my subjectivity both offers me insights and at the same time sets limits on my ability to understand others, particularly targeted groups.

While feminist theorists have rightly challenged the traditional oppressive identity that men have imposed on women, there is little awareness of the limiting effects of traditional views of masculinity for men. Furthering our understanding of the identity formation of privileged groups and of the role of schooling in this process is crucial to men's reclaiming a fuller sense of masculinity. Enabling males to challenge their own limited gender socialization may also reduce the necessity for men to oppress women in order to prove their masculinity.

While issues of sex equity in the social studies have been addressed in relation to the curriculum, and methods of instruction, little attention has been given to the role of the social studies in supporting traditional masculinities. This may be related to the fact that a majority of secondary social studies teachers are male (Lowe, 1983) as well as reflecting the biases and limitations of the traditional positivist research paradigm. Male social studies teachers entering the profession

have to be aware of their own gendered identity and of the gendered lenses that they bring to their classrooms.

Male Identity Formation

Tolson (1977) sees the foundations of masculinity as being laid down in boyhood, in a boy's experience of family, school, and peers. He describes masculinity as an explicit system of taboos and recognitions of status: "Boys devote themselves to the testing of masculine prowess - in fights, arguments, explorations of the local neighborhood - and there is a complex boyhood culture of mutual challenge" (p. 32). He also refers to boys learning a masculine language, which prescribes certain topics (sports, machines, competitions) and certain ways of speaking (jokes, banter, and bravado). This informal culture of the peer group interacts with and sometimes explicitly counteracts, the formal culture of the school.

The limiting effects of traditional male socialization have been classified under three headings: the pressure to live up to the masculine ideal, dysfunctional characteristics of the male role, and dehumanization of the oppressor. Hartley (1974) argued the "demands that boys conform to social notions of what is manly come much earlier and are enforced with much more vigor than similar attitudes with respect to girls" (p. 7). Neitlich (1985) suggests that men get caught in the cycle of needing to feel male, with the oppression of others as the only socially acceptable way available to prove their manhood.

In addition to having to live up to an idealized and unrealistic role, the adverse effects of traditional definitions of masculinity for men have been noted (Pleck, 1981). Neitlich (1985) identifies a key aspect of male oppression as being the way in which men are set up to kill and be killed by other men in the name of their manhood. She sees male violence against men as being socially condoned.[1] In order for men to accept the role of killer in the name of their manhood, Neitlich argues, men are systematically conditioned from early on not to feel, not to express their pain, fear, grief, and hurt.

Sattel (1989) connects men's inability to express feelings, to the role that men are expected to carry out in exercising power over others. He argues, "to effectively wield power, one must be able both to convince others of the rightness of the decisions one makes and to guard against one's own emotional involvement in the consequences of that decision" (p. 376). To be masculine is "to be 'cool' and to 'tough it out,' no matter how painful or dangerous a situation is" (Neitlich 1985, p. 15).

The fear of femininity has been identified as one of the main consequences of traditional male socialization (O'Neil, 1982):

> Men fear that expressing their feminine sides will result in devaluation, subordination, and the appearance of inferiority in front of others. Men are aware that women's femininity is devalued by other men

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[1] P. Corrigan (1991), "The making of the boy: Meditations on what grammar school did with, to and for my body," provides a good personal account of the various forms of legitimated violence boys experience at school.

> and attempt to avoid situations where their femininity could be observed and also devalued (p. 18).

O'Neil (1982) described six ways in which the fear of femininity acts to limit and control men's behavior. These include restricted emotional expression, the fear of closeness between men, few close personal relationships, and obsession with achievement and success. Men's tendency to evaluate life success in terms of external achievements and to ignore internal experiences of living have been described as involving self alienation (Harrison, Chin & Ficarrotto, 1989). Men are cut off from themselves and from developing meaningful relationships with others. Fasteau (1974) described men as needing an excuse to talk, an activity or object about which to talk: for men to talk personally about themselves, he suggested, involved too great a risk.

The last way in which male socialization acts to limit men is that through oppressing others, men are themselves dehumanized. Although men derive benefits and privileges from the exploitation of women, it has also been argued that oppression dehumanizes the oppressor. Freire (1981) states "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized" (p. 42). The oppressor role creates impoverished relationships and isolation. Neitlich (1985) provides a good summary of male conditioning.

> The societal oppression of men leaves most men feeling less than fully male, never quite able to live up to the standard of a 'real man'; emotionally and physically numb; unable to deeply give and deeply receive love, to nurture, to be tender, and to pay good

> attention to others; focusing the majority of their energy and attention on work and the world as opposed to relationships and the home environment; feeling responsible for financially, emotionally, and physically supporting and fixing everything; feeling disposable; being required to fight, and simultaneously feeling afraid of other men's violence; competitive; having difficulty becoming physically or emotionally close to other men and feeling emotionally and affectionally dependent on women and therefore terrified of rejection (p. 15).

In describing the process of male socialization it is also important to recognize the existence of dominant and subordinate masculinities as influenced by factors such as race and social class. Men dominate women and a small number of men dominate the masses of men. Although only a small number of men may occupy the category of dominant masculinity, very large numbers are complicit in sustaining this model, because most men benefit to some extent from the subordination of women (Botkin, 1988).

Neitlich (1985) connects men's socialization to the roles required of them in the economic system. She argues that men are conditioned to play the roles of workers and killers to maintain the economic system for profit. Thus, she argues, men's oppression like women's is economically motivated to reinforce the class system. Men's need for power over women is, in part, a response to their experience of feeling powerless themselves (Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). This includes being dependent on women for validation of their masculinity, as well as competing with, and being controlled by, other men in an exploitative economic structure (Botkin, 1988).

I have suggested that it is important to examine the social construction of white male identity, to understand "how men are made and how men make themselves" (Kimmel and Messner, 1989, p. 10). One of the important institutions in the formation of identities is schooling.

Schooling and White Male Identity Formation

Apart from studies by Weis (1990), Willis (1977) and Connell (1993), the role of schooling and white male identity development has received little attention. In addition both Weis and Willis consider only working-class males. Much of our understanding of boys and schooling has been provided through studies on sexism, examining the differences in treatment and behaviors of boys and girls in schools.

A number of studies have suggested that boys face greater difficulties in entering school than girls do (Frazier & Sadker, 1973; Sexton, 1974). Goodman (1987) suggests that there is a basic conflict between the school code with its demands for propriety, obedience, cleanliness, quiet, and mental passivity, and the norms of male culture. Moreover, he suggests that the emphasis placed on success and achievement may offer a few individuals great feelings of accomplishment, but for most men it results in feelings of insecurity and anxiety. The emphasis on competition and hierarchy in schools has been identified as supporting the development of certain aspects of masculinity. The competitive struggle for masculinity is played out in sports, exams, fights and jokes (Tolson, 1977).

Sport has been identified as having a central role in the construction of masculinity (Fine, 1987; Foley, 1990; Sabo, 1987; Whitson, 1990). Foley (1990) describes the way football in North Town high school socializes males into traditional masculinities, as well as reproduces, race, class and gender inequalities. Some of the prized titles for football players includes "somebody who could take it," a player who could bounce up off the ground as if he had hardly been hit. The highest compliment, however, was to be called a "hitter" or "head-hunter." A hitter made bone-crushing tackles that knocked out or hurt his opponent (p. 127). In contrast to the high esteem of the macho football players, male members of the band were called "band fags." Male band players were subjected to a daily ritual degradation which included having their biceps punched as hard as possible. If this aggression was met with a defiant smile or smirk, the band member was a real man; if he winced and whined, he was a wimp or a fag (Foley, 1990).

The sexism and racism identified in Foley's football players (1990) was also documented by Weis (1990) in her study of white working-class males at Freeway High School. Weis drew two conclusions: "the identity of working-class males is both racist and sexist, and the school does not interrupt the racism and sexism in any serious way, but offers a site upon which a certain form of masculine identity expression is encouraged" (p. 1). These conclusions were similar to Willis (1977) in his insightful analysis of how working-class lads get working-class jobs. While

Willis's analysis underscores the role of social class in the lads' behavior, their behavior also offers important insights on male identity formation.

In rejecting the official values of the school and the priority given to mental work, Willis described the lads as being involved in constructing their own identity. Violence played a central role in the lads' behavior. Willis stated that violence and the judgement of violence were "the most basic axis of the lads' ascendence over the conformists," (the group of students who conformed to school values). Violence was both physical and verbal and was directed both to outsiders and to members of the group. Willis stated that there was a positive joy in fighting for the lads, in causing fights through intimidation, in talking about fighting and about the tactics of the whole fight situation (p. 34). He described the fight as being the ultimate test of each lad's membership in the group: "the fight is the moment when you are fully tested in the alternative culture. It is disastrous for your informal standing and masculine reputation if you refuse to fight, or perform very amateurishly" (p. 35).

Violence and intimidation were directed towards the conformists and to male students of color. Willis described the lads' attitudes to the "earoles," the lads' term for conformists, as "expressed clearly and with a surprising degree of precision through physical aggression" (p. 34). For the Asian and Black students, Willis referred to "frequent verbal, if not actual, violence shown to the 'fuckin wogs' or the 'bastard pakis'. The

mere fact of different color can be enough to justify an attack or intimidation" (p. 48).

The importance attached to physical strength flowed over into a more general devaluation of girls and anything female. Females were seen as sex objects whose role was to cater to male needs. As Willis stated, the model for the girlfriend was the mother "and she is fundamentally a model of limitation" (p. 45). This view was supported by Weis (1990): "basically white working-class males affirm a form of assumed male superiority which involves the constructed identity of female not only as 'other,' but as 'less than' and, therefore, subject to male control" (p. 5).

In concentrating on the importance of class relationships, Willis does not challenge the conventional views of masculinity and of male violence embodied by the lads. Weiler (1988), has criticized Willis for not challenging the sexism and racism of the lads' behavior. Willis appears to interpret the lads' violence in a positive light as a sign of working-class resistance to the middle-class values of the school, supporting the view of the school as a center of conflict and contradiction.

Willis's analysis gives little attention to the effects of the lads' violence, particularly for white males. How do the conformists cope with their fear, jealousy, anxiety and frustration (p. 16)? How do the lads in the group who are picked upon by other members of the group, "almost to the point of tears," deal with their situation?

Willis's account documents the role of schooling in contributing to the development of traditional masculinities. The importance of being tough, competing with peers, continually having to prove oneself, being subject to both verbal and physical violence, not being able to acknowledge hurt, are all central features of male identity that schooling often explicitly supports. I suggest that the way boys are mistreated by societal institutions including schooling, and particularly the violence boys commit against each other, provides an important link in the understanding of the way in which men oppress women and other targeted groups.

Given that pre-service teachers have themselves experienced many years of schooling, how can teacher preparation programs better prepare social studies teachers to confront sexism and limiting definitions of masculinity? What messages did trainees receive at school about their own gender identities and what role can reflection on prior school experience play in making it less likely that pre-service social studies teachers will promote limiting gender definitions?

Support for the use of autobiography as an instructional tool in exploring the connections between prior experience and present teaching practice is provided by Bullough, 1990; Butt, Raymond and Yamagishi, 1988; Goodson, 1980; Knowles and Ems, 1990; Pinar, 1988; Quicke, 1988; and Woods, 1987. Autobiography, from a critical perspective, has been used to confront and change existing beliefs, exposing the influence of social, ideological

and historical forces (Britzman, 1986; Norquay, 1990; Weiler, 1988). Such an approach may enable teachers to redefine their beliefs from idiosyncratic preferences, to the product of deeply entrenched cultural norms of which they may not even have been aware (Smyth, 1992).

Method

Three male pre-service social studies teachers enrolled in the "Methods of Teaching Social Studies" course, were randomly selected from a pool of volunteers.[2] The students ranged in age from early to late twenties, and most had attended suburban schools in the Northeast. All the students were white and all were from the middle class. The students were awarded credit for participation in the study as part of the final project required in the Methods course. In-depth interviews were used, each student being interviewed twice, once at the beginning of the project and once at the end. The interviews were structured with a specific set of questions and each interview was audio-taped.

In the initial individual interviews the participants were asked specific questions about their prior school experiences and how they related those events to their understanding of the teacher's role and work. After the student teachers were interviewed individually, a support group was established in

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[2]The study was part of a larger study examining the influneces of prior school experiences on pre-service social studies teachers. The study involved six pre-service teachers, three male and three female and investigated the influences of prior school experiences on beliefs about teaching and learning as well as the influences of schooling on gender identity formation.

which similarities and differences in experiences were explored. The support group, in which the researcher acted as facilitator, met for two hours a week for five weeks.

A main topic examined in the support group was the influence of prior school experience on the development of the participants' gender identities. The researcher provided a theoretical framework which included a model of human beings as loving, caring and intelligent. This model was contrasted with the traditional role expectations for males. Student teachers were asked to identify both positive and negative experiences of schooling which related to their gender identity. They were then encouraged to re-evaluate the negative experiences, and to work on reclaiming a fuller sense of their own male identity. Having access to a more accurate picture of male identity enabled the students to redefine incidents which had been defined as being a result of personal inadequacy

A second interview was carried out at the end of the project after the support group meetings had been completed. The participants were asked some of the same evaluative and self knowledge questions asked in the initial interview. The differences between the answers in the initial and second interview provided some indication of changes associated with the intervention.

Male Identity

Both Brian and Ted went on to university after they finished high school. They also had involvement with the military. Brian

was in the ROTC. Ted had applied to Norwhich University military school but was rejected because of a hearing difficulty. In explaining his interest in the military Ted stated "I didn't want to kill people but I felt that the army was a swcure profession and gave you a good caarer." Peter, who was in his early thirties had recently returned to school to complete his degree.

For all of the students one of the main pressures was to "be tough," not to show any signs of emotion or weakness. Their stories included numerous references to physical violence, including being beaten up by male peers, beating up other males and being physically beaten by principals, parents and others.

Brian was both least aware of himself as a gendered being and also had the most difficulty in identifying ways in which his schooling had influenced him. In the first interview, when asked about his worst experiences he replied "that ones kind of tough. Most of them I didn't care about." He spoke dispassionately as if unaffected by his school experience. He spoke of being a tough kid at school: "Anybody who talked to you would tell you I was a tough kid, I mean it was attitude, everything." He described himself as being "very much of a punk" and being placed in a situation where "I was very capable of inflicting pain, both physical and emotional pain." Rather than picking on those who were helpless, instead, he picked on

> . . . tennis players or people like that or valedictorians, people who are so sure that they were better than everybody. If they were walking in the hall I'd walk directly toward them and give them a look and God help them if they didn't move out of my way.

Brian described some of the benefits of being tough, including being free to go anywhere in the school, not being teased for baking cookies and not being accused of "being a weirdo or a wimp or a homosexual or anything because I didn't have a girl friend."

Ted spoke about how the pressure to be tough affected him: "Often times I know I developed a thicker skin through the socialization as a boy in schools, because you weren't supposed to let anything affect you as part of being tough." Ted saw that being thick skinned protected him against some of the ribbing and some of the other problems he experienced.

One of Peter's worst experiences was when his father was called into the school and he gave the Vice Principal permission to hit his son. Peter described the incident:

> There was a day when my Dad was called into school, this was eighth grade, the problematic year, and they told him what I'd done, I'd tripped somebody, and he said to the vice principal go ahead and hit him. And I was sitting there saying don't, don't say it, this guy can really hit. And my Dad left . . . . He had parental permission to do what ever he wanted to do. He gave me four licks instead of three, and that was tough.

Both Brian and Ted spoke about the hard part involved in trying to maintain their male identity. Ted described the hardest part as "probably not being allowed to cry and now I still have a hard time . . . I think that was the hardest part, being given a hard time for having emotions, for expressing emotions." Brian also spoke about the time he cried in fifth grade and how after that he "never cried in front of anyone else again." He spoke about not having anybody to whom he could really talk. For emotional support Brian depended on a rabbit:

> Any time I got really upset, I shouldn't say I never cried after fifth grade, no one ever saw me cry, I would grab my rabbit and go into the woods and I would sit down and hold him and cry. That's a hard part keeping up the attitude.

Brian spoke about the pressures involved in maintaining his reputation. "It would upset me. It bothers me because you had to pick on these kids. I mean not so much the kids with the glasses or because they were in the band or something like that, but you had to pick on somebody."

One of the most difficult parts of Peter's school experience was being teased by peers and by two male teachers for his enjoyment of music. He described having to sneak in sheet music underneath his coat so that "none of the big guys would push on me or take it away." In relating this incident to the group he said it was the first time he had ever talked about this and it hurt him to do so. He referred to having some bias in his own life because the experiences were so ingrained. Peter recognized this teasing as homophobia.

Discussion

Asking pre-service social studies teachers to reflect on the role of schooling in the formation of their gender identities, both individually and in the context of a support group, challenged their thinking about teaching and education in three ways: by sharing experiences, students were forced to go beyond their own individual experience to explore similarities and differences, through enabling them to better integrate their experience as a student and their role as teacher, and through

helping them recognize the role of power in education, both in their own experience as a student and in their role as a future teacher.

Through reflecting on the role of schooling in shaping their own gender identity, the pre-service teachers gained a better understanding of these issues for students. This was particularly so for two of the participants, Brian and Ellen. Prior to the work in the support group Brian had thought of himself as an isolated individual, largely unaffected by his school experience. Through reflecting on his school experience as a male and sharing this with the other men in the group, he began to recognize that what he had assumed to be his own individual identity was part of a more general, socially constructed male identity:

> I didn't realize how strongly those values have been, are implanted in me . . . . I was surprised to see how really stereotypically male that I had been, more so in high school than now but still now. When we did that group work I was kind of embarrassed. It's kind of scary.

Shifts in response to interview questions indicate that reflection had provided the student teachers with a much greater awareness of the power they would exercise as teachers in shaping students' identities. Through recognizing the influence of schooling in his own identity formation, Brian was now much more concerned about the power that teachers exercise:

> That's something that we really have to worry about, it's one of the biggest negative aspects of school, we take away these kids identities, and they loose their individuality and I hadn't really thought of it or realized it until this group.

The intervention also allowed Ellen to redefine her worst school experience, a situation in which she was verbally abused by a teacher. Where she previously had made sense of this experience by blaming herself, concealing her intellectual abilities and making physical attractiveness the center of her identity, she was now able to recognize the connection between the larger social and political forces which oppress women and the limiting role into which she was forced. She spoke about how the support group helped her make the connection:

> I hadn't made the connection before. I just maybe felt that, sort of put myself down for it, I let myself get that way not citing any reasons for it. 'I'm just a fluff, just a total bimbo in high school.' I always just blamed myself for a weakness in character.

Conclusion

The study provides support for the value of pre-service social studies teachers critically reflecting on the role of schooling in the formation of their gender identities. School experience appears to play an important part in shaping students' gender identities. Through reflecting on their own school experiences, pre-service social studies teachers are less likely to promote limiting gender definitions for their own students.

The social construction of masculinity and the role of schooling in this process is an area whose importance is only just being recognized. Askew and Ross (1988) have created specific anti-sexist courses or units for boys, including units on friendship and heroes. Further strategies for social studies teachers include, developing activities which allow students to

see the ways in which they have been socialized, drawing out students' experiences and connecting these to the issues being taught, and using journals to allow students to respond at a more personal level (Novogrodsky and Wells 1989). It is essential both for men's development and in order to overcome sexism and racism, that social studies teachers seek to challenge the limitations of traditional definitions of masculinity.

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